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The Mediating Effect of Hostility Toward Women on the Relationship Between Childhood Emotional Abuse and Sexual Violence Perpetration

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Some evidence suggests that childhood emotional abuse (CEA) may serve as a risk factor for sexual violence (SV) perpetration; however, little is known about the mechanisms by which CEA may influence SV. This study examined the relationship between CEA and SV by assessing the mediating role of hostility toward women (HTW) in a sample of adjudicated adult males ($N = 360$). Approximately 1 in 5 participants was classified as sexually violent based on self-reported behavior and/or criminal records. Results indicated that CEA significantly predicted HTW and SV, and HTW significantly predicted SV. As hypothesized, the relationship between CEA and SV was no longer significant after controlling for HTW, supporting the role of HTW as a mediator between CEA and SV. Efforts that aim to prevent CEA or that address early aggressive attitudes or behavior toward women may have a positive impact on preventing or reducing SV.

Keywords: psychological abuse; rape; sexual violence; child maltreatment; sexual coercion

Sexual violence (SV) is a pervasive public health issue, with recent estimates suggesting that approximately 20% of U.S. women have been forcibly raped in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011). In addition, earlier data from the National Violence Against Women Survey indicated that at least 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men had experienced an attempted or completed rape during their lifetime (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). There are significant negative short- and long-term health consequences for victims of SV, including posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance use (Borowsky, Hogan, & Ireland, 1997; Kilpatrick, Resnick, Ruggiero, Conoscenti, & McCauley, 2007; Walker et al., 1999). Understanding the causes and correlates of SV perpetration is criti-

cal to informing prevention efforts and reducing the harm associated with SV victimization. Research over the past few decades has begun to identify a range of risk factors and correlates associated with SV as a means of understanding and preventing SV perpetration. These risk factors and correlates span a range of individual, peer, family, and community characteristics and include factors such as child maltreatment (Widom, 2001), witnessing interpersonal violence (Borowsky et al., 1997), and emotionally unsupportive family environments (Meyerson, Long, Miranda, & Marx, 2002). One well-established model of SV perpetration, the confluence model developed by Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, and Tanaka (1991), suggests that some individual risk factors for perpetration may originate or be directly influenced by family background factors such as early negative home environments and parent-child interactions. Specifically, tests of these models (Malamuth, 1998; Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995; Malamuth et al., 1991) suggest that exposure to these early negative home environments is associated with an increased risk of exposure to deviant peer groups and engaging in risky behaviors, including early sexual behavior, which in turn are associated with an increased risk of SV perpetration. These experiences interact with the development of attitudes supportive of rape and hostile masculinity to predict involvement in SV (Malamuth, 1998; Malamuth et al., 1995; Malamuth et al., 1991). Consistent with this model, this article is focused on examining one potential mechanism by which exposure to hostile childhood environments may increase later risk for SV perpetration among males. Specifically, we examine whether the predictive relationship between childhood emotional abuse (CEA) and later SV perpetration can be explained, in part, by the development of hostile attitudes toward women. We chose to focus on CEA, in particular, because of consistent emerging evidence of a relationship between these experiences and SV behavior and to expand understanding of the ways in which this relatively understudied form of child maltreatment may function to create negative outcomes for victims.

Childhood Maltreatment as a Predictor of Sexual Violence Perpetration

One family-level risk factor that has received significant attention for its potential role in the etiology of SV perpetration is child maltreatment. Numerous studies with different samples (e.g., community, college, high school, or sexual offenders) have found that men who perpetrate SV are more likely than nonperpetrators to have experienced different forms of child maltreatment—including physical, sexual, neglect, and emotional abuse (e.g., Borowsky et al., 1997; Fineran & Bolen, 2006; Jonson-Reid & Way, 2001; Lee, Jackson, Pattison, & Ward, 2002; Ronis & Borduin, 2007; J. W. White & Smith, 2004; Zurbriggen, Gobin, & Freyd, 2010). In a review of the literature, White and colleagues (2008) found that perpetrators of both physical and sexual aggression witnessed more domestic violence and experienced more parental physical punishment and more sexual abuse as a child than nonperpetrators. Another study found that students who had a history of child sexual abuse by a family or a nonfamily member were more than twice as likely to report SV perpetration as students who did not report sexual abuse (Borowsky et al., 1997). Furthermore, evidence suggests that child sexual abuse victimization may be a stronger risk factor for later child sexual abuse perpetration than for SV perpetration against peers and adults (Jespersen, Lalumière, & Seto, 2009; Weeks & Widom, 1998). Regarding childhood neglect, Jonson-Reid and Way (2001) found that incarcerated youth who were reported to child welfare for neglect and had records of two or more additional reports for maltreatment were more likely to be adult sexual offenders.

In contrast to the relatively larger literature on the effects of child physical and sexual abuse on SV perpetration, much less research attention has been paid to CEA in the SV literature. This focus on physical and sexual abuse is generally consistent with the broader child maltreatment literature, where emotional abuse has also received less attention. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines CEA as including behaviors that harm a child's self-worth or emotional well-being such as name-calling, shaming, rejection, withholding love, or threatening (Leeb, Paulozzi, Melanson, Simon, & Arias, 2008).

Like other forms of child abuse, some recent work has begun to identify a consistent link between emotional abuse and SV perpetration in adolescence and adulthood. Studies by DeGue and DiLillo (2005) and DeGue, DiLillo, and Scalora (2010) found that a history of CEA was associated with physical SV perpetration, but not nonphysical sexual coercion, in a sample of college students and a prison sample, respectively, when controlling for other forms of child maltreatment. Similarly, Zurbriggen et al. (2010) found that, when controlling for child physical and sexual abuse, CEA was the strongest predictor of adolescent SV perpetration for both males and females in a college sample. Higher rates of CEA have also been reported among adjudicated adolescent sexual offenders (Zakireh, Ronis, & Knight, 2008) and adult sexual offenders (Lee et al., 2002) than in comparison samples of nonsexual offenders. These results have been replicated in an international sample, specifically, a community sample of German men (Krahe, Scheinberger-Olwig, & Schütze, 2001). Another study that examined a composite measure of child emotional and physical abuse among high school students also found that these experiences were directly related to SV perpetration among males (Fineran & Bolen, 2006). Thus, current evidence, although limited, suggests a relationship between these early emotional experiences in the home and in SV perpetration.

Linking Childhood Emotional Abuse and Sexual Violence Perpetration

Although evidence of a connection between CEA and SV perpetration is accumulating, little is known about the mechanisms that may explain this relationship. Examining other factors associated with these maltreatment experiences may provide some guidance. For instance, CEA exposure has been linked to several negative emotional and interpersonal outcomes among victims, including anger and irritability (Teicher, Samson, Polcari, & McGreenery, 2006), dissociation (Teicher et al., 2006), marital dissatisfaction (Perry, DiLillo, & Peugh, 2007), and increased psychopathy and interpersonal deficits (Mullen, Martin, Anderson, Romans, & Herbison, 1996). The development of these risk characteristics, or others, as a result of emotional maltreatment increases an individual's odds of engaging in other negative behaviors, including SV, and may impede the development of successful and satisfying relationships in adulthood (Davis, Petretic-Jackson, & Ting, 2001), including sexual relationships and intimacy (Davis et al., 2001; Mullen et al., 1996).

According to attachment theory, early parental messages and responses, whether positive or negative, lead to the development of a belief system and pattern of attachment that influences future relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Several studies have examined attachment to parents among children and youth who have experienced child maltreatment. Results suggest that children and youth who are abused display a disorganized attachment type, which denotes a lack of a coherent (or organized) strategy for dealing with everyday stressors (Main & Solomon, 1990). With adult sexual offenders, Hudson and Ward (2007) found that men displaying *fearful* (i.e., in which models of self and others are negative) and *dismissive* (i.e., in which

models of self are positive and others are negative) attachment types reported more anger expression. In addition, adult sexual offenders with fearful attachment types reported significantly greater hostility toward women (HTW) than those with other attachment types (Hudson & Ward, 1997). According to Dutton and Hart (1992), these behavioral patterns may contribute to the increased likelihood of a victim of child maltreatment growing up to become a perpetrator of some form of violence. For instance, Rohner and Rohner (1980) found that children feeling rejected by their parents (i.e., perceptions of hostility, being unloved, and neglected by parents) tended to be more hostile and aggressive and had problems managing their hostility.

There is also an evidence that the exploiter–exploited relationship in which children who are maltreated find themselves can manifest in other negative ways including becoming hostile and aggressive in peer relationships (Cicchetti & Toth, 1995; Troy & Sroufe, 1987). Children who are maltreated show deficits in social information processing, which may also contribute to hostile and aggressive responses in peer relationships. For example, children who are abused tend to exhibit a hostile attributional bias for peers' intentions (Price & Glad, 2003), and these attributions can predict externalizing behavior and conduct problems among victims of maltreatment (Price & Landsverk, 1998). Thus, it may be that the relationship between CEA and SV is mediated by one or more such factors.

Hostility Toward Women and Sexual Violence Perpetration

Although the literature linking CEA to increased hostility, anger, and aggression is limited, a substantial literature links HTW, specifically, to male perpetration of SV. HTW is an attitudinal construct that has been associated with SV perpetration in over 25 studies to date (e.g., Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton, & Buck, 2001; DeGue & DiLillo, 2004; DeGue et al., 2010; Farr, Brown, & Beckett, 2004). There is also some evidence to suggest that HTW may moderate the relationship between SV perpetration and other variables, including alcohol use (Hall, Sue, Narang, & Lilly, 2000) and impersonal sex (Malamuth et al., 1995; Wheeler, George, & Dahl, 2002). In addition, one recent study found that men's HTW was the strongest predictor of sexual aggression identified after controlling for other attitudinal risk factors such as rape myth acceptance and sexism (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004). Of course, not all males who endorse hostile attitudes toward women perpetrate SV, and some studies have found null effects for this variable (Calhoun, Bernat, Clum, & Frame, 1997; Lackie & De Man, 1997). However, Greene and Davis (2011) surveyed a community sample of men and found that the highest rates of SV were reported among males with the highest levels of hostile masculinity (defined as rape myth acceptance, sexual dominance, adversarial beliefs about heterosexual relationships, and misogyny).

Hostility Toward Women as a Mediator Between Emotional Abuse and Sexual Violence Perpetration

Given links between CEA and increased general hostility and aggression, as well as an established relationship in the SV literature between HTW and SV perpetration, we hypothesized that HTW might mediate the relationship between CEA and SV. Thus, this study examines a mediational model with four hypotheses: (a) CEA will predict SV perpetration, (b) CEA will predict HTW, (c) HTW will predict SV perpetration, and (d) the relationship between CEA and SV will be mediated by HTW. Although other forms of child maltreatment have also been associated with SV in the past research, the focus of this study is exploring potential explanations for the relationship between CEA and

SV perpetration specifically. Thus, experiences of child physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect are not examined in these analyses.

METHOD

Participants

Participants included 360 recently adjudicated adult males recruited from a Midwestern state correctional facility. The mean age of participants was 32.1 ($SD = 10.2$) with a range of 19–67 years. Most participants were White (65.6%); however, other ethnic groups were represented in the sample (African American, 16.9%; Hispanic/Latino, 8.1%; Native American, 3.1%; Multiracial, 6.4%). Most participants were unmarried (45.8%) and had a 9th–11th grade education (44.2%).

Participants had a mean of 14 ($Mdn = 11$) criminal convictions, including the index offenses (i.e., homicide, rape, and robbery). Almost all participants (95%) had been convicted of at least one nonviolent offense (e.g., drug offense, theft). About half of the participants (51.9%) had been convicted of at least one violent nonsexual offense (e.g., homicide, assault). Sexual offenses (e.g., sexual assault of an adult or child) were less common, with less than a quarter of the sample (23.1%) convicted of an offense in this category. Participants self-reported being incarcerated a mean of 38.4 months ($Mdn = 15$) since the age of 18 years.

Measures

Hostility Toward Women Scale. The HTW Scale (Check, Malamuth, Elias, & Barton, 1985) includes 30 items assessing angry and distrustful attitudes toward females in a true–false format (e.g., “It is safer not to trust women”). Check et al. (1985) reported acceptable reliability and validity for the HTW, which has been shown to correlate significantly with a history of SV. In addition, an alpha coefficient of .81 indicated high internal consistency for this scale in the present sample. Total possible scores on this scale ranged from 0 to 30.

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire. This Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Fink, Bernstein, Handelsman, Foote, & Lovejoy, 1995) is a 25-item self-report inventory (1 [*never true*], 5 [*very often true*]) that provides a brief assessment of childhood abuse experiences, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as physical and emotional neglect. Because of our specific interest in explaining mechanisms linking CEA and SV, only continuous subscale scores for CEA (five items) were used in these analyses. Total possible scores for this subscale ranged from 0 to 25. This subscale includes items assessing verbal abuse and name-calling (i.e., people in my family said hurtful or insulting things to me; people in my family called me things such as stupid, lazy, or ugly), feeling unloved by family members (i.e., I thought that my parents wished I had never been born; I felt someone in my family hated me), and perceived history of emotional abuse (i.e., I believe that I was emotionally abused). Coefficient alpha for the emotional abuse subscale in the current sample was .85.

Sexual Experiences Questionnaire. A history of self-reported SV perpetration against a female victim was assessed using a 12-item version (0 [*never*], 4 [*often*]) of the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Lisak & Roth, 1988). The SEQ is a short-form version of the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss & Gidycz, 1985; Koss & Oros, 1982), which has been used extensively in the previous research on sexual perpetration. A reliability coefficient of .89 for college men and 1-week test–retest reliability with a mean item agreement of

93% was reported by Koss and Gidycz (1985) for the SES. Lisak and Roth (1988) conducted a small-scale assessment of validity for the SEQ using posttest interviews and reported “a greater degree of validity . . . than was earlier reported” for the SES.

For this study, only items examining the use of sexually violent tactics, including drug or alcohol incapacitation and the use or threat of physical force to obtain unwanted sexual contact. The dataset used in this study was collected as part of a larger study reported in DeGue et al. (2010). This study found that CEA predicted physically violent sexual behaviors but did not predict the use of nonphysical sexual coercion (DeGue et al., 2010). In addition, DeGue and DiLillo (2004) examined psychological abuse as a predictor of nonphysical sexual coercion in a college sample and found no relationship. Thus, five items assessing the use of nonphysical sexually coercive tactics (e.g., continual arguments, threats to end the relationship) were excluded from this study because previous analyses indicated that the requisite relationship between CEA and nonphysical sexual coercion needed to test the mediational hypothesis was not present. In addition, two items assessing general sexual experience (i.e., any sexual intercourse with a woman) and experiencing an urge to force sex on a woman that they did not act on were excluded. Thus, the remaining five items assessing any sexual contact (fondling or intercourse) obtained through the threat or use of physical force, attempted physical force, or secondary to getting a victim too drunk or high to physically resist were used to determine the presence of self-reported SV behavior.

In addition to self-reports of SV, this study examined criminal records to identify those participants with a past sexual assault conviction involving an adult female. Given that official conviction rates vastly underestimate the prevalence of SV (e.g., Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987), a multiple informant approach can provide a better estimate of these behaviors. Participants who are identified as sexually violent through either self-report, records review, or both were classified as having a history of SV. Participants who did not self-report physical forms of SV and had no history of sexual offense convictions were classified as nonperpetrators. Data from both SV perpetrators and nonperpetrators were included in this study to permit the prediction of group membership using the hypothesized risk factors, CEA and HTW.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from a Midwestern state correctional facility. All inmates at this facility were entering the correctional system following a recent criminal conviction to undergo medical and psychological evaluations before being transferred to another facility. Recruitment signs were placed throughout the facility, inviting inmates to participate in a research project concerned with “life experiences and sexual behavior.” All male inmates were eligible to participate regardless of their convicted offense. Data collection took place in small groups (<10 participants) facilitated by a graduate student and a trained research assistant. Interested inmates were presented with an informed consent form, which was read aloud by the investigator at the start of the session. Confidentiality of participant responses, especially regarding prison officials, was emphasized by the investigator during data collection. Participants were informed that responses would be confidential and that their participation would not affect their relationship with the criminal justice system. Participants were not asked to provide their name or other easily identifiable information on study materials. With participants’ consent, criminal history information was coded based on available medical records, police reports, and court documents in institutional files. Participants were assigned an ID number, which permitted the researchers to link survey data with their criminal history information during data analysis; the key was stored in a locked, off-site

filing cabinet accessible only to the primary investigator. Participants were compensated upon completion of the study with a payment of \$10.00 directly deposited into their institutional account. This study was approved by institutional review boards at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and the state correctional agency. Data for this study was collected as part of a larger project; findings from that study are available in DeGue et al. (2010).

Data Analysis Procedures for Test of Mediation Model

The primary aim of this study was to examine the hypothesis that HTW mediates the relationship between CEA and SV. Two complementary approaches were used to test this mediational model. First, consistent with the approach outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986), four hypotheses were tested using a series of logistic regression analyses to demonstrate a mediational relationship: (a) CEA predicts SV, (b) CEA predicts HTW, (c) HTW predicts SV (when controlling for CEA), and (d) the relationship between CEA and SV is reduced to nonsignificance when HTW is included in the model. To predict between-group differences, the full sample of 360 men was used in these analyses, with 71 categorized as SV perpetrators and the remainder ($n = 289$) categorized as nonsexual offenders. Although the method outlined by Baron and Kenny is consistent with convention (MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007) and provides an intuitive test of the proposed mediational model, researchers have more recently identified some limitations of this approach including low power and an inability to estimate the strength of the mediation (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Thus, additional approaches have been developed that allow for more direct tests of the mediational effect (MacKinnon et al., 2002). One such approach, the Sobel test, provides a direct test of the mediational effect by comparing the strength of the indirect effect with the null hypothesis that it equals zero. Thus, as a supplemental follow-up test of the mediational model, we conducted a Sobel test using the approach developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004) for SPSS. No additional covariates or mediators were included in the model.

RESULTS

Table 1 provides descriptive data and intercorrelations for each of the measures included in the study.

Of the 360 participants, 19.7% ($n = 71$) were categorized as sexually violent based on self-report on the SEQ or as indicated in the criminal history information obtained from institutional files. Most sexually aggressive men (63.4%; $n = 45$) were identified as perpetrators based on their self-reported behavior on the SEQ alone. Another 31% ($n = 22$) of perpetrators were identified based on criminal records indicating a prior sexual offense conviction involving an adult female, or on the agreement of both self-report and official records (5.6%; $n = 4$). Most of the sample (80.3%; $n = 289$) were classified as nonsexual offenders and were included in logistic regression analyses predicting SV behavior. Approximately one in three participants (29.5%) reported low to severe levels of CEA using the cut scores provided by Bernstein and Fink (1998). Scores on the emotional abuse ($M = 5.8$, $SD = 5.8$) and HTW ($M = 10.1$, $SD = 5.4$) scales were significantly correlated ($r = .22$, $p < .01$).

As discussed earlier, regression analyses were employed to examine each of the conditions outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986) for mediational analyses (see Figure 1). First, the relationship between CEA and HTW was tested using linear regression with CEA

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics for Child Emotional Abuse (CEA) and Hostility Toward Women (HTW)

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	Range	<i>r</i>
CEA	5.85 (5.77)	0–20	.221*
HTW	10.11 (5.36)	0–25	—

Note. Full sample included $N = 360$ incarcerated males; $n = 71$ sexual violence (SV) perpetrators and $n = 289$ non-SV perpetrators.

* $p < .01$.

entered as the predictor and HTW as the outcome. Next, a stepwise logistic regression analysis was conducted in which CEA was entered as a predictor of the dichotomous SV outcome in Step 1, and HTW was included as an additional covariate in Step 2. As hypothesized, CEA independently predicted both HTW ($t [1, 358] = 4.23, p < .001$) and SV ($B = .06, SE = 0.02, p = .006$). In addition, HTW was a significant predictor of SV, when controlling for CEA ($B = .10, SE = 0.03, p < .001$). Finally, to examine the mediational hypothesis, SV was regressed on CEA while controlling for HTW. Results indicated that the relationship between CEA and SV was no longer significant when controlling for HTW ($B = .04, SE = 0.02, p = .064$), suggesting a complete mediation effect.

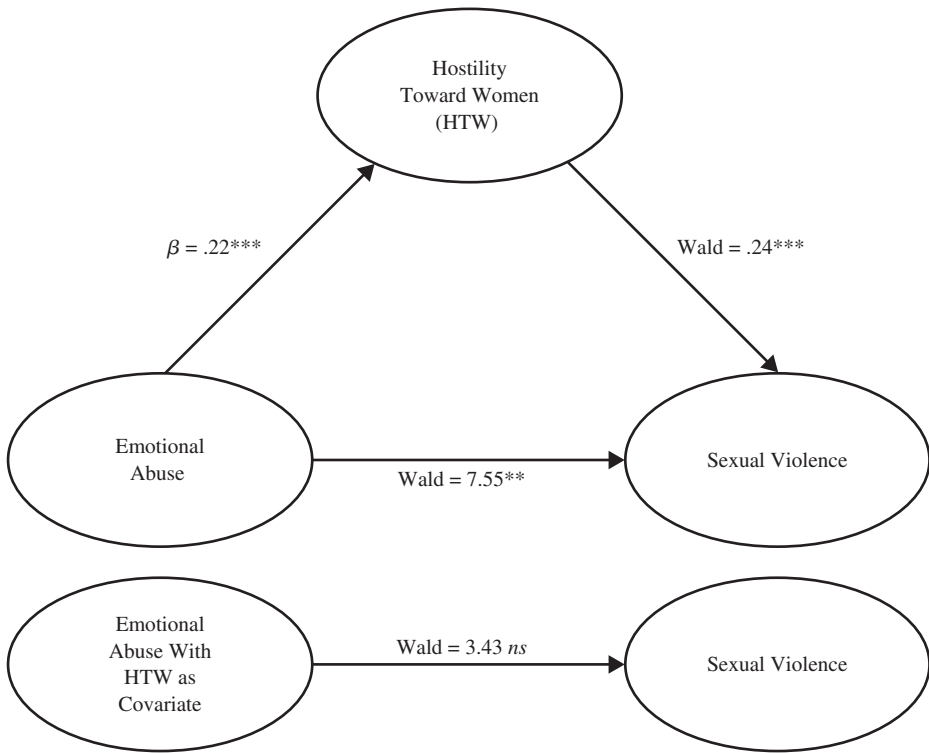


Figure 1. Meditational model of emotional abuse, hostility toward men, and sexual violence. *ns* = not statistically significant. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

A follow-up Sobel test was conducted in accordance with Preacher and Hayes (2004) as a confirmatory test of the mediational hypothesis. In this one-step analysis, CEA was entered as the causal variable, SV was entered as the outcome variable, and HTW was included as the hypothesized mediator. The results of this test also found a significant indirect effect indicating that HTW significantly mediated the relationship between CEA and SV ($z = 2.85, p = .004$).

DISCUSSION

Results of this study are consistent with the previous literature linking child maltreatment experiences and SV perpetration across samples, including among adjudicated men. Approximately one in five participants were identified as SV perpetrators in this study based on multiple data sources, including self-report and criminal history information. In addition, 29.5% of men were identified as victims of CEA. Previous research suggests that a history of CEA is associated with physical SV perpetration (e.g., DeGue & DiLillo, 2005; DeGue et al., 2010; Zurbriggen et al., 2010). Although no studies have directly examined the relationship between HTW and CEA, there is some evidence that hostility, more broadly, may mediate the effects of child maltreatment on intimate partner violence perpetration (H. R. White & Widom, 2003).

This study expands this work by testing the hypothesis that HTW mediates the relationship between CEA and SV perpetration. Our test of the mediational model supported this hypothesis. Results indicated that CEA independently predicted both HTW and SV, and HTW predicted SV behavior. However, the relationship between CEA and SV was no longer significant when controlling for levels of HTW. That is, the apparent contribution of emotional abuse to SV perpetration was accounted for by the presence of hostile and angry feelings toward women. As such, a history of emotional abuse may be more likely to represent a critical risk factor for sexually aggressive behavior when such experiences contribute to the development of HTW.

These results suggest that feelings of anger, suspicion, and resentment toward women may represent an important risk factor in the development of sexual aggression among males who are emotionally abused. The findings are consistent with the confluence model, which points to both negative early environments, and HTW may be an important risk factor for rape (e.g., Malamuth, Heavey, & Linz, 1996). Furthermore, findings regarding the link between emotional abuse and HTW suggest the possibility that the CEA experienced by some sexually aggressive men, perhaps at the hands of a female caregiver, may be a distal source of HTW, resulting in an increased willingness to use physically aggressive means to obtain sex regardless of the potential victim impact. Although very limited empirical evidence is available regarding the sex of CEA perpetrators (Allen & Epperson, 1993), some research has shown gender differences in perpetration by abuse type. For instance, one study found that significantly more child physical abuse and neglect perpetrators were females, whereas child sexual abuse perpetrators were more often males (Milner & Robertson, 1990). Given that most primary caregivers are female, it is possible that females may also account for a large proportion of CEA perpetrators. The experience of CEA by a female caregiver may result in not only increased risk for general anger, hostility, and aggression but also possibly hostility or anger directed specifically at women, a characteristic known to increase risk for engaging in violence against women. Thus, the experience of emotional abuse

by a female caregiver during childhood may result in anger and distrust toward women in general—factors that increase the likelihood of adult sexual aggression. Given this study was not able to examine the sex of the CEA perpetrator, future research should seek a better understanding of the relationship between the sex of the perpetrator and the impact on the child regarding anger and HTW.

Although these results shed light on the effects of CEA on HTW and future SV perpetration, additional research on the characteristics of CEA perpetrators and the emotional and behavioral outcomes associated with victimization is needed. For example, with little information on who perpetrates CEA, it is unclear if there are differences in the effects of father-perpetrated and mother-perpetrated CEA in the development of hostility or other outcomes. There is also a need to better understand the characteristics of the relationship between the CEA perpetrator and the child, as well as the characteristics of the child himself or herself, to identify any potential protective factors that may buffer against negative emotional and behavioral sequelae, including the development of hostile attributions and the perpetration of SV.

Understanding these characteristics may assist researchers in developing and testing programs to prevent CEA or to buffer the effects of CEA exposure. Currently, there is very little evidence available from rigorous evaluations about “what works” to prevent CEA or to ameliorate its long-term impact. More research is needed on the correlates, causal factors, and risk indicators associated with CEA to inform development of such preventative interventions, given their potential for preventive impacts in multiple domains of functioning, including violence against women. Although there is some evidence that effective programs exist to prevent child maltreatment (e.g., Triple P; Thomas & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007), little is known about intervention effects on CEA specifically. This may be caused by the fact that CEA has not been a focus of research until recently. In addition, it may be more difficult to define and measure CEA when compared to other types of abuse such as physical abuse (Fallon et al., 2010). Lastly, child emotional maltreatment is less likely to be captured by official records data. For example, physical abuse and neglect represent more visible forms of child maltreatment and, thus, have a higher likelihood of being reported to child protection agencies and substantiated (Gilbert et al., 2009).

Although there are few evidence-based programs to prevent child maltreatment or treat those who have been exposed to child maltreatment, there is even less evidence about “what works” to prevent SV perpetration. However, intervention efforts aimed at preventing SV perpetration among at-risk individuals (perhaps including those who have experienced CEA) may benefit from addressing potential feelings of hostility and aggression toward women as well as the potential connection between these attitudes and early abuse experiences in the home environment.

This study has several limitations. First, although the measure that is used to assess childhood abuse experiences has well-established reliability and validity, it does not capture characteristics of the perpetrator(s). Thus, we were not able to determine whether emotional abuse was more frequently perpetrated by a female caregiver. Collection of data on perpetrator sex is needed in the general child maltreatment literature and would help address the question raised here about sex differences in the perpetration of CEA. Second, this study used data from an adequate, yet small sample of adjudicated males in a state correctional institution. It is likely that rates of SV are higher in this sample than the general population, which may limit generalizability to community samples of men. However, the use of this sample provides access to both retrospective self-report

measures and official criminal history information and ensures capture of a broader range of SV behaviors than either method alone. The use of retrospective self-report measures for both child maltreatment and adult sexual behavior, although necessary in the absence of long-term longitudinal data, may result in intentional or unintentional errors in recall. Intentional underreporting of SV may be partially offset by the availability of criminal records data in this study for those participants who were convicted of sexual offenses but failed to self-report them. Finally, because these data are cross-sectional, it is not possible to determine whether HTW developed before or after the CEA experiences or SV behaviors. Longitudinal data would be needed to examine whether these attitudes represent a true risk factor for SV or an outcome of CEA, or whether they are simply a correlate of both.

In summary, this study provides preliminary evidence to suggest that exposure to CEA may be associated with the development of hostile and angry feelings toward women in some men, leaving these men at an increased risk for SV perpetration. Additional research is needed to replicate these findings with community samples of men and to examine characteristics of the victim, perpetrator, or abuse experience that might increase (or decrease) the likelihood that HTW will develop. An improved understanding of the mechanisms by which early childhood factors may influence later sexually violent behavior may help inform the development of prevention and intervention efforts for at-risk individuals and move us closer to a reduction in violence against women.

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